

THE DESIGN AND TENDENCY OF CHRISTIANITY TO DIMINISH THE
MISERIES AND INCREASE THE HAPPINESS OF MANKIND.

AN

ADDRESS

DELIVERED AT

THE RETREAT FOR THE INSANE,

IN HARTFORD,

AT THE

DEDICATION OF THAT INSTITUTION

TO THE

BLESSING OF ALMIGHTY GOD, AND TO THE PURPOSES
FOR WHICH IT WAS ESTABLISHED,

APRIL 1, 1824.

BY THOMAS ROBBINS,
MINISTER OF THE GOSPEL IN EAST-WINDSOR.

HARTFORD :

PRINTED BY GOODWIN & CO.

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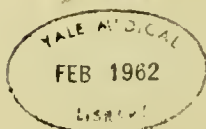
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Resolution copied from the Records of the Directors of the Retreat.

Resolved, That Bishop BROWNELL, Mr. WATKINSON, and Dr. SUMNER, be a Committee to communicate to the Rev. Mr. Robbins the thanks of the Directors for his discourse delivered this day, and to request a copy of the same for the press.

J. LAW, Secretary.



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C8H

AN ADDRESS.



MR. PRESIDENT,*

CHRISTIAN FRIENDS AND BRETHREN.

THE occasion on which we are assembled, is suited to lead our minds to various important and useful reflections. When we look upon this noble Edifice, these secure and lofty walls, reared by the hand of Christian charity, with the numerous provisions for the relief and comfort of the most wretched of our race, our first sentiments ought to be those of gratitude to God, who has disposed the hearts of his people to this benevolent and great design.

All benevolent institutions, which are designed to meliorate the condition, or exalt the character of man, result from the influences of that holy religion, which brings all our comfort, and all our hope. Permit me, then, to call your attention to a few of its leading truths, and, especially, to the character of its great Author, the divine Nazarene. He, who went about doing good ; who came, deliberately, to the altar of God, to make his soul an offering for sin ; who has taught us to love one another, and to commiserate the afflicted ; is the Lord whom we are bound to serve, the character presented for our imitation, the Mediator in whom we trust.

Concerning the character of this holy Redeemer, we have an interesting testimony, suited to the present occasion, in the gospel of Matthew. *And Jesus went about all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, and preaching the gospel of the kingdom, and healing all manner of sickness, and all manner of disease, among the people. And his fame went throughout all Syria : and they brought unto him all sick people, that were taken with*

* The Hon. NATHANIEL TERRY.

diverse diseases and torments, and those which were possessed with devils, and those which were lunatick, and those that had the palsy ; and he healed them.

The earliest *doctrines*, taught by our Lord, were those of holiness and grace, and the first *works* of his public ministry, were works of charity and mercy. The period, at which the events here mentioned took place, was immediately after his first appearing in his public character.—The sacred historian, having spoken of his baptism, and his temptation, immediately presents him to our view, lifting up that warning voice, so terrible to the wicked, *Repent : for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.* He calls four humble fishermen to attend him, and enters, at once, the places of divine worship, preaching the gospel of the kingdom of God.—That all may know his true character, as a compassionate Saviour, as a divine Redeemer, while he proclaims pardoning mercy to the guilty and eternal life to the penitent, he heals all manner of sickness and disease. Being the Saviour of the Gentile as well as the Jew, all Syria bring to him the lunatick, the possessed, the tormented, and they are healed.

Your attention is respectfully invited to the following sentiment. *It is a primary design, and the invariable tendency, of the religion of Christ Jesus, to meliorate the condition, and increase the happiness of mankind.*—For the confirmation of this sentiment, a few thoughts will be briefly suggested.

The *first* is the personal character of its great Author. HE always went about doing good ; when he was reviled, he reviled not again ; when falsehood and malice joined to accuse him, his jealous Judge washed his hands in terror, and declared, *I find in him no fault at all.* He had a work to perform, the greatest work ever undertaken, to appease the holy wrath of heaven, and save ruined man : but his labour and suffering were never intermitted, till it was accomplished. Historians, poets, and philosophers have laboured, in every age, to find, in reality or fiction, a *perfect character.* In the babe of Bethlchem ; in the carpenter of Nazareth ; in the preacher

of Galilee ; in the victim of Calvary, from whose sufferings the sun hid his face ; and in him alone, it is found.

If any one virtue appeared more conspicuous than another, in the character of Christ, it was that of compassion for the distressed. The sufferer always engaged his attention : the sick were healed, the demoniacs were exorcised, the lunatics were restored. The sorrowing, of every description, found compassion in his holy soul ; the *insane* found in his bosom a safe *retreat* from their unequalled sufferings.—When he sent forth his apostles to preach the gospel, he commanded them to perform the same works of mercy, which they had, so often, seen in him.

The *second* thing that we shall notice, in illustration of the truth before us, is the nature of Gospel precepts. When we look for the precepts of our religion, we go to all parts of the holy scriptures : for prophets and apostles, are, alike, built upon the foundation of Jesus Christ, he himself being the chief corner-stone. All these precepts are suited to conform the characters of men to that of their glorious Author.

The moral precepts of the gospel are, indeed, very different from the maxims of the world. *Ye have heard that it hath been said, Thou shalt love thy neighbour, and hate thine enemy.* This was the ancient morality ; and it is the morality of all men whose sentiments are not formed on the standard of the gospel of Christ. The Saviour proceeds :—*But I say unto you, Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you and persecute you.* For the sanction of these precepts, he adds, *That ye may be the children of your Father which is in heaven : for he maketh his sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust* The performance of these duties will bring us to a conformity to our heavenly Father. It has been a question for ages, What is the standard of moral duty ?—It is the character of God. All the moral precepts of revealed religion are of the same general nature and tendency with those

already noticed. They are designed to produce peace on earth and blessedness in heaven.

The *third* and principal thing which we shall consider, in confirmation of the sentiment now in view, is the effects which have been always produced by the religion of Christ. One of the most important of these is the formation of individual character. Where, in the annals of human story, do you find examples of powerful intellect, of moral virtue, of public usefulness ;—in short, of all that constitutes human greatness, to be compared with Moses, Daniel, and Paul ? Their compeers do not appear on historic record, nor in the productions of fiction. The first of fabled heroes, who led his countrymen from Ilium to the banks of the Tiber, will not compare with Joshua and Nehemiah.

Personal character is always formed by precept and example. The moral precepts of philosophers and sages are all deficient, barren, heartless, compared with the morality of the Bible. And their personal example is still worse. Indeed, we always find moral character falling short of precept. *But pagan character is farther from a conformity to its own precepts than the christian.* Look at the best of the wise men of pagan countries, who have been so long the theme of admiration ; and often introduced to prove that mankind have no need of a revelation from God. Xenophon put away his slaves, to die by hunger, when they became unfit for labour. Timoleon murdered his brother. Lucius Junius Brutus put to death his son. The elder Cato constantly insisted that Carthage, the rival city of Rome, must be destroyed. Hannibal, Marcus Brutus, and the younger Cato, died by their own hands. Cicero deserted his friends in time of danger ; and declared, at the death of his daughter Tullia, that he hated the gods for taking her from him. Demetrius Poliorcetes, and many others, were addicted to vices not to be named. Trajan, and the Antonines put to death great numbers of the christians, though allowed to be among the most peaceable and industrious subjects of the

empire. It is not necessary to introduce characters, formed by the gospel of Christ, to be compared with those now mentioned. A single comparison, however, may be useful. Of all the Romans, no one has been more celebrated for his private virtues and sweetness of temper, than Germanicus, the adopted son of Tiberius Cæsar. His military talents and success were not less conspicuous. When he perceived his end approaching, he observed to his friends, "Were I to die a natural death, yet should I have just cause to complain of the gods for thus snatching me from my relations, my children, and my country, in the flower of my age." But, believing himself to be dying by poison, he exhorted his friends to revenge his death on those persons whom he considered the authors of it. And, in his last moments, received an oath from them that this should be done. Now look at one who was his cotemporary, Stephen, the first martyr for Christ. Seeing the vindictive rage of his enemies rising against him, he faithfully declares to them the way of life and blessedness, till the stones of death are hurled upon him;—then, looking stedfastly into heaven, he sees Jesus at the right hand of God; he kneels,—*Lord, lay not this sin to their charge*,—and dies.

Marcus Aurelius, the first of Roman Emperors, was strongly attached to the religion of the empire, and hated the Christians. The reason evidently was, that their lives cast all Roman virtue into the shade. Because they would die for their religion, with a composure, a rejoicing, a dignity, which had never been witnessed in the heroes of patriotism, or the devotees of idolatry, he called it *obstinacy*.—The philosophers, with scarcely an exception, justified slavery, revenge, and suicide.

Religious persecution, among pagans, has not been uncommon. Not merely that they persecute the religion of the true God, which is well known, but that one species of idolatry will persecute another. Nebuchadnezzar, the noted monarch of Assyria, having subdued a great part of Egypt; wherever

he went, he threw down their gods, plundered their temples, and carried off their images. When Xerxes entered Greece, he caused their temples and idols to be demolished. He was attended by many of the Magi, who taught him that the religion of Greece, being different from theirs, was false, and ought to be destroyed. Anacharsis, the illustrious Scythian, brother of the king, travelled into Greece, and brought home some of the images of their gods, different from the gods of Scythia. The king detected him in offering private worship to these foreign gods, and, with his own hand, put him to death.* Socrates was accused before the high court of Areopagus in Athens of introducing religious rites and sentiments different from those publicly acknowledged, and was condemned and executed.

Public morals, in all pagan countries, have been such as we should look for, where such as has been stated was the character of the best men. No city has been so eminent for its moralists and philosophers as Athens. Yet the morals of the city were always low, and their vices great. In no city has the vice of avarice prevailed to a greater extent. Their most distinguished patriots seldom escaped the severest tokens of public ingratitude and popular envy. The city never produced any better men, so far as we know, than Aristides, Socrates, and Phocion. The first was banished, and the other two put to death. We have heard much of *Spartan* virtue. The citizens lived in idleness, excepting the employment of war, and a majority of the population were oppressed and degraded slaves. The great reason of the insufficiency of pagan morals to regulate the passions of men, was that they were destitute of the only sanctions which could give them efficacy, the retributions of eternity.

The improved condition of every order of society, wherever the gospel is known, is obvious and great. This sentiment, I know, is controverted by the enemies of revealed religion,

*The journey of this Prince gave occasion to the valuable modern work, by the Abbe Barthelemi, entitled, "Travels of Anacharsis."

with great zeal: and we experience some want of facts for a *full* discussion of the subject. Enough, however, is known, amply enough, to assure us that *the dark places of the earth*, where the light of salvation shines not, have ever been *full of the habitations of cruelty*, and that *happy is that people whose God is the Lord*.

In the consideration of this subject, candour requires that we look at paganism in its best state, and not that we go to the degraded Asiatics, as is too often done at the present day, for a specimen of the moral state of all people, who are destitute of the light of the gospel. But, in the most favourable view of Gentilism, compared with christian communities, the sentiment advanced is fully confirmed.

We have no inclination to withhold a deserved tribute from the wisdom of pagans. In view of the moral darkness in which they have groped, their efforts and success, in some respects, have been truly astonishing: such as to shame christian countries for their errors and vices, while they enjoy the light of the Sun of Righteousness. I admire, exceedingly, “the glory of Rome and the wisdom of Greece.” Some of their citizens exhibit an energy of the human mind which has never been surpassed. Their activity, their intellectual resources, their perseverance, their love of country, will secure the admiration of the most distant ages. We highly esteem the prudence of the Magi, the sagacity of the Brahmins, and the active intelligence of the worshippers of Isis. These form the brilliant constellation of the starry night. And had they no comparison but a night of clouds and darkness, they would be splendid indeed. But they all fade before the rising glories of the morning Sun.

The morals and happiness of a community are much affected by their laws. Pagan countries, generally, have but few laws that are permanent. The best interests of the community are subject to the temporary enactments of the ruling power. Rome had no fixed laws till about 300 years from the building of the city. In most ancient nations, the debtor who was unable to pay the demands of his creditor, usually became

his slave, and, frequently, together with his wife and children. Slavery prevailed to a very great extent. Mr. Hume computes one half of the population of the Roman empire, at the time of its greatest extent, to have been slaves. I know of no ancient law or usage for the restraint of slavery, but the Jubilee of the Hebrews. The principles of civil liberty were very little understood. The rights of person, property, and reputation, were poorly secured. By the laws of Rome, possession of personal property for one year, and of lands for two years, gave a title. No court could resist popular feeling. In their public laws, the welfare and benefit of the great mass of the community was seldom regarded. The learned author just noticed, who had no prejudice against pagan nations, observes, "To one who considers coolly on 'the subject, it will appear that human nature in general really 'enjoys more liberty at present, in the most arbitrary government of Europe, than it ever did during the most flourishing 'period of ancient times.'"* The usages of war, in pagan countries, are sanguinary and cruel. Helpless prisoners are often put to death ; and captives are enslaved. In the Roman triumphs, numbers of the most illustrious prisoners were usually murdered, as the procession entered the forum.

It is not to be denied that many excellent statutes and most valuable provisions are contained in the laws of pagan countries. But it is equally true that many of these, even those which became most permanent and general, are derived from divine revelation. The most celebrated Lawgivers of antiquity, Zoroaster, Minos, Lycurgus, and Solon, procured their most important ordinances from the kingdom of Israel. They were all cotemporary with the princes of the house of David, who were a succession of more illustrious monarchs than is found in any other family mentioned in history. From the codes of the Lawgivers just mentioned, the three eminent Senators of Rome, who were sent abroad for the purpose,† compiled the laws of the twelve tables, which became

* *Essays*, Part II. Essay XI. † Posthumius, Sulpicius, and Manlius. B. C. 352.

the *Magna Charta*, the fundamental principles of all Roman law. On these were founded the decrees of the Senate, and the edicts and codes of the Emperors. And the Roman law has continued to be the standard of jurisprudence in all civilized countries, ever since the fall of that empire. Thus, the civil law of all the most improved countries, ancient and modern, is built essentially on the foundation of the great Lawgiver of the Hebrews, who wrote under the illumination of the Spirit of God.*—On this subject, permit me to add, as a further evidence of the obligation of heathen nations to divine revelation, that, according to the opinion of Sir William Jones, after a laborious and very learned investigation of the subject, the mythology of ancient India, Greece, and Italy, is originally the same;† and that the whole system of their polytheism is no more than a fabulous view of the history of the most ancient patriarchs, according to the account given by Moses. Having spoken of “the popular worship of the old Greeks and Italians, and that of the Hindoos;” Mr. Jones proceeds. “Nor can there be room to doubt of a great similarity between their strange religion and that of Egypt, China, Persia, Phrygia, Phœnice, Syria; to which, perhaps, we may safely add some of the southern kingdoms and even islands of America; while the Gothic system, which prevailed in the northern regions of Europe, was not merely similar to those of Greece and Italy, but almost the same, in another dress, with an embroidery of images apparently Asiatic. From all this we may infer a general union or affinity between the most distinguished inhabitants of the primitive world, at the time when they deviated, as they did too early deviate, from the rational adoration of the only true God.”‡

*The ridicule that has been so liberally bestowed upon the fathers of New-England, for making the laws of Moses the fundamental principles of their jurisprudence, is altogether misapplied.

† The late Dr. Ward, of Serampore, in his valuable View of the Idolatry of the Hindoos, concurs in this sentiment.

‡ Works, Vol. I. page 229, quarto edition.—A part of the preceding detail was omitted in the delivery.

Of all institutions, ever devised, none are so effectual to diminish the miseries and increase the happiness of any people, as the social worship of the living God. This can hardly be called an *effect*, as it is a positive appointment of the religion of Christ. Pagan worship cannot produce this effect. The divinities that form the objects of this worship are, confessedly, the patrons of almost every vice and crime. Their worshippers cannot be expected to possess better characters than they ascribe to their principal deities. We cannot, therefore, wonder, that falsehood, impurity, cruelty, violence, are generally prevalent in such a community. But, in the worship of the God of heaven, we appear in the presence of a Being of infinite perfection, who searches all hearts, on whom we are dependent for all things, who will bring every work into judgment. The first commandment of his law requires us to love him with all the heart ; the second addresses us, *Sirs, ye are brethren ; why do ye wrong one to another ?*

While the employment of divine worship excludes all collisions of private interest, a sense of common guilt and helplessness before God, of mutual wants and dependence on each other, is eminently suited to produce brotherly love, kindness to the needy, and compassion for the distressed. When we assemble for prayer and praise, and for instruction from the truth of God, looking to the divine Emmanuel as our only Mediator, then, if ever, we learn to forgive an injury, to do good to all as we have opportunity ; then, if ever, does the soul long to gather the whole family of man to the fold of Jesus and to join in the endless praises of redeeming love.

“ Let strangers walk around
 “ The city where we dwell,
 “ Compass and view thine holy ground,
 “ And mark the building well.

“ The orders of thy house,
 “ The worship of thy court,
 “ The cheerful songs, the solemn vows,
 “ And make a fair report.

“How decent and how wise !

“How glorious to behold !

“Beyond the pomp that charms the eyes,

“And rites adorn’d with gold.”

Charitable Institutions, to supply the destitute and relieve the distressed, are peculiar to christian countries. Where the gospel is not enjoyed, these are unknown. Pagan countries can exhibit the magnificence of wealth, the splendour of the arts, the achievements of patriots, the triumphs of conquerors ; but they have no public habitation for the forsaken poor, no hospital for the sick, no home for the stranger, no asylum for the speechless and the distracted. They have skill to enslave subjugated nations, but they know not how to console the aching heart of the widow, or dry the orphan’s tear. Columns of Corinthian marble rise to adorn the temple of a speechless idol, at the expense of thousands and thousands, while the broken hearted and the contrite perish with want.

All who know the gospel of Christ are taught to help the poor, not merely by its numerous precepts for that purpose, but by the example of Him, who, *though he was rich, yet for our sakes became poor, that we, through his poverty, might be rich.* The heir of all things has not where to lay his head, the king of all heaven’s hosts becomes a servant, meek and lowly in heart. Do you, my brethren, wish for a portion in the blessedness he has provided for his people ? Do you, amid the anxieties and disappointments of human life, look and hope for that rest which remaineth for the people of God ? The conditions are unequivocal. *He hath shewed thee, O man, what is good ; and what doth the Lord require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God.*

The public charities of christian countries, which are, usually, more or less, according to the purity with which the gospel is taught, are designed, generally, to relieve the afflicted. The unavoidable evils of life are many, calamities which are the consequence of imprudenc and vice are many more, the

most of which may be greatly mitigated by the judicious application of christian charity. To administer this relief, so far as in our power, is not less a dictate of humanity, than enjoined by the precepts of the gospel, and by the example of Christ. I envy not the prosperity of him who knows not the comfort of doing good. Who has never rejoiced the heart of the poor, or encouraged the desponding with beams of hope.—Who will be accepted, in the day of final decision, that has not fed the hungry, clothed the naked, visited the sick, and relieved the distressed? I know of none. Having seen it to be a primary object of the religion of Christ Jesus to diminish the sorrows and increase the happiness of man, no one can be more surely in the service of its divine injunctions than when cordially devoted to these objects of charity. And there is no way in which we can more truly obey the great command of Christ, *Follow me*.

As many most important charities, are of a nature not to be performed by private beneficence, they must depend on public institutions. Of this description, eminently, is the relief of the Insane. When the divine Emmanuel was present on earth, he relieved many of these sufferers by his miraculous power. That power is now withdrawn. But upon the united efforts of his people, judiciously directed to this object, he has uniformly bestowed his rich blessing: that the victims of high distraction have often become clothed and in their right mind, and many a gloomy sufferer has exchanged the aspect of woe for the countenance of contentment and praise. So far as we know, no public charity, for the relief of the distressed, has been more successful than this. This, indeed, was to have been expected, for there is, probably, no human suffering more acute than that of insanity; and there is none, certainly, which sooner moved the Saviour's compassion while on earth.

This public Institution, for the benefit of the Insane, designed for a Retreat from the various afflictions and temptations to which they are, ordinarily, exposed, where they may enjoy the treatment of parental tenderness and medical skill, is,

exclusively, the work of charity. The Legislature of the State have made a liberal grant for the furtherance of the object, which demands our grateful acknowledgment. But the principal resources have arisen from individual charity. And I am happy to say that these have come from many hands, and many hearts, that the blessing of those ready to perish may rest upon them.

From the period when the design of this Institution was formed by the Medical Society, to this day, it has eminently enjoyed the approbation and favour of heaven. No similar institution in this country has so eligible a site, this building is large, commodious, and secure, it has been erected, together with the necessary accommodations, with great fidelity and prudence, and no unfortunate accident has occurred in the progress of the work. Its resources are, yet, greatly inadequate to the magnitude of the objects which it contemplates, funds for the gratuitous support of the necessitous are eminently desirable, and we trust, in the rich mercy of God, that they may yet be provided. My brethren, we have seen the blessings derived from the religion of the Lord Jesus. All these are presented, in their abundant fulness, to us. And what did they cost? The humiliation, the groans, the blood, of God's eternal Son. You will best show your gratitude, when, like him, you remember the children of sorrow and distress. To your kind remembrance, to the benevolent regard of the people of the State, we commend this infant christian charity. The deranged are often found in the cottages of poverty and concealment. *Go out into the highways and hedges, and compel them to come in.*

At the first meeting of the Society, after they became a corporate body, the meeting was opened and the operations of the Institution commenced with prayer to God. The members of the Society cordially united in looking to him for the guidance of his Spirit, that they might be enabled to prosecute this charitable design, that it might become extensively useful, committing the whole to the blessing of his

grace.—And, having thus far completed the work, by the good hand of our God upon us, we now appear in his presence to present it to his holy keeping.

This magnificent Edifice, with all its appendages, O our God, we dedicate to thee. Lord, accept of it in mercy, and hold it as thine own. And we devote it to the service of the afflicted subjects for whom it is designed, under the blessing of thy merciful Providence.—It is not by might, nor by power, but by thy Spirit, O Lord of hosts. May the blessing of God Almighty long rest upon it, and make it eminently successful in restoring reason to the distracted, in comforting the desponding, releasing the tempted, and restoring the broken-in-heart to comfort and peace. May the Lord extend the abilities of the Institution, in proportion to the wants of the afflicted, that none may be deprived of the blessings it is designed to afford. And may many hundred souls, sinking under the guilt and dangers of sin, here obtain saving relief from their bondage, through the abounding grace of the Spirit of God.

To all the friends and patrons of this Institution, to all whose charity has aided in its establishment ;—In behalf of the Society which has the management of its concerns, in behalf of the numerous sufferers who are looking hither for help, in behalf of sufferers yet unborn, I tender the most grateful acknowledgments. *Christian Friends, present or absent, the Lord reward you.*

The liberality of this town, for public charities, will not be unnoticed or unrewarded on high.—Standing on this eminence, we view the Asylum for the Deaf and Dumb, the first institution of the kind in this country, and the Retreat for the Insane, two of the distinguished ornaments of our State, and contemplate the immense amount of human suffering they may be made instrumental of relieving. These are the triumphs of the religion of the Prince of Peace. O that the benign influences of his gospel may overspread the earth : that its present triumphant march may proceed with accelerated velocity, till it shall irradiate the darkness of all human abodes with the holy beams of heavenly love.



